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12-17-1984

December 17, 1984 Interview with Edward Lansdale - Part 1

Cecil B. Currey

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Recommended Citation

Currey, Cecil B., "December 17, 1984 Interview with Edward Lansdale - Part 1" (1984). *Edward Lansdale Interviews*. 54.

https://scholars.fhsu.edu/lansdale_interviews/54

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Side 1, Recorded December 17, 1984, page 1--Edward G. Lansdale

C: Good morning, good morning, Seventeen December, 1984...I've gone all the way through the tapes that we've ^{made} ~~done~~ before and I've got them transcribed, and some questions have come up that, you know, are just holes in what we've said before.

L: Yeah.

C: You haven't really told me much about your mother, except that she liked California, she always was homesick for it. She liked to make trips back there, and she grew up in northern California.

L: Northern California, yeah.

C: What else can you tell me about her, General?

L: Well, she came back, she met my father in Washington here, and she was living with an uncle, who was a Washington correspondent for an Ohio newspaper. And she, I don't know how she met my father, they didn't go to the same high school, I don't think my father went to high school, I don't think he ever got that far, which she did, and she lived up in Cleveland Park and my father lived in Georgetown, but my father's sisters have told me more recently, they are dead now, the sisters, but they told me they remembered her hanging around the gate of the fence to their house at Georgetown and she used to say hello to all the brothers, there was many brothers, it was a big family, but she liked Harry, was what the family called my dad, and it's hard to describe ones mother you know. She loved to paint, she was quite an accomplished artist, an amateur artist, but she painted in oils and did landscapes and all of her paintings went to brothers of mine when she died. They figured I didn't need it because I painted myself, so I didn't need my mother's paintings. But she did some lovely things, landscapes of...she loved mountains out in California, these are mostly mountain scenes, and so on she did. She was a very good cook.

L: I learned a lot of cooking from her by helping her cook when I was a kid. She loved to drive. She was one of the very early women drivers, because my dad being in the automotive industry, we always had cars, and she always had her own car. But I remember as a kid growing up, she would drive us places, and all of us would try to get in and drive when we were, oh, about six or seven years old. We all learned to drive very early. I was seven years old anyway. My dad married again after my mother died. I know very little about his second wife; I was out of the country and out of touch with them at the time, so it was sort of a mystery to me, his life, after...later on.

C: What was the name of the second wife?

L: Ethel...I think it was...her name was Downen (?) whether that...she had been married previously and that might have been the previous husband's name, I'm not sure, it was in Detroit (?), I'd have to go back and look at it. I wrote a family history; I might have it noted down in there. I remember when my mother died, I was...Magsaysay had asked me to come back to the Phillipines, I was being assigned to Indochina, but Magsaysay wanted me to come back to the Phillipines and help him with his relations with his Congress, and particularly his Senate. And he had called to President Eisenhower and asked for me, and Eisenhower ordered me out there right away to him, so I was very reluctantly going back to the Phillipines instead of getting ready for Indochina, because I didn't have languages or anything which I wanted to try to get before going. So I got packed up to go, and my mother died, and they were going to have a funeral for her in Los Angeles so I thought I would stop on the way out. So I went down to catch a flight to Los Angeles, and I got on the plane at National Airport and it was very delayed in the takeoff, and we all sat there and sat there and the aircraft didn't take off on time. I was commenting to the other

L: passengers, why doesn't this thing get going, you know, I've got someplace to go, and we were all grumbling. And finally on came Carlos P. Romulo, the Phillipine Ambassador, had asked them to delay takeoff so he could come in to give me his condolences over my mother. And I felt, oh, gosh, that's terrible, you know, for being griping, and so on at the delay of the takeoff. It was a very nice gesture on his part, but I remember that quite vividly. But my mother and I were quite close. She lived for a time with me in California in Morin County where I had a home, and she loved Morin County, too, and it was very close to where she had grown up as a little girl, a few miles away from there, just up north of San Francisco. But that affected me more than my father's death really. I was close to him later on. When I grew up, I suddenly discovered how smart he was. All my life I had gone along figuring he was way beyond reach of knowing, and so on, and I hadn't taken the pains to get to know him as much as later on. Later on I discovered that he was a very bright person, very knowledgable, very well read, tremendously so. For a man with no schooling he was probably better self-educated than almost anyone I've known. He could have ^{gotten a doctorate in} ~~as a doctor~~ and several skills, including archaeology and studies of ancient people and so forth, he was a tremendous historian by his own love of the subject and really read copiously. A strange person for an automotive executive.

C: You were telling me very briefly the other evening your feeling about Bill Colby, about how he was quite a nice person^{to you}, and I wonder if on tape you would sort of give me a thumbnail sketch of your relationship to him and how you felt about him.

L: Well, I had seen Bill Colby a number of times in Washington and he was one of the CIA people that was very honest in his talks, and a person you could trust

L: was telling you the truth, which you couldn't with very many of their real operators. But he had an honesty that showed. And when I went out to Saigon in the end of the Eisenhower administration, at the end of 1960, Colby was the Station Chief in Saigon and gave me a dinner when I got there, had a lot of his staff in and was trying to explain what the situation was as they saw it, this group, and in his book he said that I didn't catch on...wasn't too interested in their presentation of the politics, which he felt was the most important part of the problem out there...the internal politics of South Viet Nam. But I kept staying away from the subject with them. Later when I wrote my report he was amazed to see that was what I was mostly concerned about. At the time, that was my major concern and he would say, I want to talk to you about politics, but if you would say, if he would say he wanted to talk about some specific things, I would have listened, but politics was such...I was very aware of them when I went out there and that is what I was looking for. As a matter of fact, a lot of Diem's closest people were estranged from it when I got there in 1960 including...

C: Estranged from Diem?

L: Diem, yeah, including his Vice President and in talking with his Vice President, who was also the head cabinet person for the economy, economical affairs. He started telling me what a terrible President Diem was and there was an old servant in his office serving tea and we were talking in English. And I said, doesn't he understand us, you know, maybe he is a spy of Diem's and go back and tell him. He said, no, I don't think so, but I don't care. So it was a deep chism there. And I said, when was the last time that you saw Diem? Socially, for dinner, or at lunch, or something? He said, it has been a very

L: long time. So I went over and I saw Diem right after that, and I said I was over there and your old friend, the Vice President, was saying he hadn't seen you for about a year socially at all. Why don't you call him up and have him over for dinner tonight? So he did. Diem was telling me, oh, I have just seen him a little while ago. I said, when? And Diem kept...couldn't remember, you know. Well, it was a week ago, no it was longer, and he kept on trying... finally he agreed with me he hadn't seen him for a long, long time. So he called him over to have dinner. And the two were beaming when I went over and saw them afterwards, after the dinner, and this guy was happy as a lark, you know. And it was just personal feelings rather than anything deep had gone wrong between them. And that was true of a number of them, so I was concerned about that ^{sort} kind of politics, the personal relationships with some of the people that ^{had} made the regime, the administration broad enough to function very well. And it had narrowed down too much, and it was Brother, Nhu, I guess largely running things, though I hadn't realized it at the time. But Colby was very much on the right track of what he was trying to do and everything in Viet Nam and I was very pleased to see that and told him as much. But I always and later on in dealing with him, I always found him very, very honest and straightforward in his talking and that's a blessing. ^{There's} very few people that ever got anyplace topside in that agency were that straightforward. It's sort of a disease or contagion that gets them, they get so used to dealing with subterfuge to do their daily work that it becomes part of their character and they don't even realize it, it's a shame, really when that happens.

C: The other evening Mr. Conein was telling nicknames about Henry Cabot Lodge. He said that behind his back he was called Cabbagehead or Hydrochloric Acid because HCL is the chemical symbol for Hydrochloric Acid. What did you feel
11..how did you feel about Henry Cabot Lodge?

L: I've got very mixed feeling about him. I think, I think his intentions were very good always. His perceptions didn't come up to his intentions. His ego would get in his way at times. He is a very accomplished person, so his accomplishments fed his ego and vice versa and he would...he would get bound up and then to the extent where he wasn't a very good executive. And he disappointed me in his lack of executive ability on some things. He had asked me to go back ^{to} and run pacification for him, which I tried to do, and I pulled the different agencies working out there and services and so forth together in a committee and tried to come up with a smooth policy. But each of them was very full of the fact that they could go to Congress independent of anything out in Saigon, me in particular, and get their funds for what they were doing so the hell with doing anything that would be in compliance. And even appeals that we have got it, this part of the war, a very critical part, and we have got to succeed ^{in it} because guys are getting killed out ^{there} on the battleground, you know, and we have got to make this thing work. They would give it lip service, but then they would stomp on it from there on, and I would beg him to knock their heads together to come along on the thing and back me up, which he said no, I put you in there to do it, you have got to do it. So, well, when they would say, we get our money directly from Congress and you can't tell us how to spend it, then that would just stomp me, and that happened. And also, he had an idea of how pacification should be done. So did LBJ; so did almost everybody out there. But most of them wanted something made in the USA that worked nice. It will never work, it has to be made in Viet Nam with the Vietnamese doing it their style ⁱⁿ and ways that they would understand. And until it is done that way and they are running it and we are supporting it as we can, or encouraging them, it won't work. And they finally got me because

L: I didn't pacify the country, and the Vietnamese pacification chief that I started with died in a plane crash, and we got a new one appointed and I had just started working with him when they came and... Cabot Lodge applied the test. He told me some province where the province chief would go out and sleep any place in the province overnight without fear for his life. And there was no place like that. I said that's a poor test, you know. I'll give you some places where he can go, religious places. The Catholics and Hoa Hoa and Cao Dai are defending their own and won't let the Communists come in and take certain villages and everything and I will tell you where it is and any province chief can go out there and sleep all night, and so will I and so will you. But we have to get this motivation going, which you want me to do it U.S. style and have Americans taking care of this business, it's Vietnamese business. Well, they pulled me off pacification, in part. I was still a friend and adviser of the Vietnamese Pacification Team, who understood what I was saying and did a very good job themselves on it. And he is living up in New Haven now, General Tang.

C: Nguyen Duc Tang.

L: Nguyen Duc Tang.

C: Your pronunciation is better than mine.

L: Yeah, well, Duc is, instead of Duck, yeah.

C: Well, you told me about Henry Cabot Lodge. How about Ellsworth Bunker? You ran into him a time or two.

L: Bunker was...again, he had an honesty to him. He was a true, old-fashioned gentleman of.....word ^{is} ~~is~~ good as his bond, which wasn't true of Cabot Lodge. Cabot Lodge was a politician, beginning and ending. His uncle had taught him in Washington how to be a good politician, which he had told me about as...his uncle

L: trained him too God damned good see. But Bunker was a surprisingly candid and honest person, and the Vietnamese thought highly of him because of that, his honesty shown through and so his...he would meet them and they figured he was telling the truth. Now, mind you, most Americans weren't telling the truth ^{to} of the Vietnamese, according to the Vietnamese. We had some sort of a game that we were playing with them and hiding some things from them. They never felt that about Bunker. I noticed that in talking to President Thieu, whom I used to talk to quite a bit. And he would tell me that Bunker had come in and said something to him, and not ask me whether it was true, but say what about other Americans, was he telling the truth, or was that right. But, so, wasn't that nice of him to tell me that, you know, and so it was the truth that they told. So I used to urge Bunker to ...I said Thieu doesn't have any real friends, even Vietnamese friends, he is quite alone. The only person he gets to really talk to is his wife, and I'm not so sure that is always a good influence on him as a President. But I am sure there are a number of things he wants to talk about and I think he would turn to you as sort of a big brother figure. Because even as big brother, would come to me and ask if I could please help the family a little bit. And Thieu didn't trust his own big brother, according to the big brother, who was operating up in Taiwan usually as, not an Ambassador but almost that, an Envoy for...but Bunker tried very hard to understand all sorts of things out in Viet Nam and I give him one hundred per cent effort as an Ambassador out there. I think he was a very fine man. When he left, Lodge talked to me and said, I'd suggest that you come home with me because LBJ wanted you out there with me on pacification, but you've failed on that and you better come home. I

L: said, no, I said we are into the political process here and I said, whether you realize it or not, I'm trying to help a lot of Vietnamese make their constitutional form of government a reality and really start working. I said there is a lot that I think I should still stay here and get done, but not indefinitely but just for a time. And I had written to Bunker when I heard that he was being appointed and asked him if he wanted me to stay and do this, and Bunker had replied, yes, he did. Well, Lodge had gone over to Guam on a trip with Phil Habib (~~illegible name~~), the two of them, and met Bunker and somebody else there, I don't know whether it was Johnson, or what ...some people from Washington, might have been Rostow (~~illegible~~), and he said, no, I talked to Bunker and he doesn't want you out there, he wants to save him embarrassment, and I said, I'm going to ask him that when he comes in. So when Bunker came out and arrived after Lodge had left, I went out to the airport to meet him, and he said, come on, ride over to the residence with me in my car. And he said, I'm very happy that you are still here. I want you to stay ^{and} ~~with~~ work with me. I said, gee, Lodge told me that you had talked to him and didn't want me, and if so, I will bow out right now. And he said, no, no, no, I want you to stay. So it was just the reverse. So, so I stayed on and there were a number of things that I did. Among other things, with my assistance, we wrote a political Bible for the Americans to work with on politics in South Vietnam, which they had never had in the Embassy before for some reason on the history of parties and how politics worked and so forth. I was trying to teach the Vietnamese how to make political organizations stay and be real workable, realistic instruments, and I don't think I ever succeeded, but I sure tried. He...Americans...some of our political people, foreign service types, taught them U.S. methods and so forth of doing things in making their government work. I was trying to get them to think of their problems and solutions to them in

L: Vietnamese terms and make him face up to it. And...and, yet, to get groups of people to participate in writing a Constitution...I remember I went up and tried to talk ^{the} to Cao Dai's into doing that. I would go up to Tai Ninh (illegible) and talk to the Pope and this lay leader, and I remember one time I was talking to the Pope and I said, we have a Constitution ourselves and it has a preamble to it which I will quote to you, but this is the reason you have a Constitution, so I tried very hard to remember the preamble and I gave it. I got all through, and he looked at me, and he said, you left out something. I said, oh, oh, you know, me and my memory. So I said, what was that? And he said, the spirit of brotherly love. And I said, that isn't in our preamble, but I said, you know when these words were written, it was at a meeting that we held in a city that was named Philadelphia, which is the City of Brotherly Love, and these words were written after the meeting was started with a silent prayer, so I said there is a spiritual background to all of this, that is very much in keeping...but the brotherly love was the heart of the religion of the Cao Dai that he wanted in. I said, I know you Cao Dai have stayed out of politics, and wanted to, but this is your country and if you want the spirit of brotherly love in the Constitution, you send some people in, you get the right people down as delegates to this Constitutional Convention to write it, and that's how you get it in. But that sort of thing, I figured I was in an unusual position and able to do that, which I didn't think that the other Americans there could do. So the Constitution was written and adopted, then we held elections and they held a... they had a Senate and a Lower House and, a very small Senate, but the Senate elections, they ran in slates of six and anybody that wanted to could run, but they would make up a slate of six and run the slate, and you would vote for a slate. And after they got elected, the Senators...just after the election, we

L: opened the new Embassy in Saigon, a new building, and we dedicated it, had a dedication ceremony^{at it} and the newly elected Senators were invited, along with other government people, to it. And during that, all the different Senators were coming up and saying to me, can you give us some clues, you know, what do we do; what committees do we have and so forth; how do we organize ^athe Senate and so forth? And I said, alright, I invited them all over to the house that night, and Bunker was handling the dedication ceremony. And he said, I notice all these Senators coming up and talking to you: what was that about? And I said, well, they don't know quite how to organize themselves and were asking for some help. And he said, jeez, do you mind if I have one of my Aides come over and be with you? And I said, oh, sure. I've invited them over for dinner, and I'll have a buffet supper and it will be a working meeting, and be happy to have him. So he sent one of his Aides over, from the political section, to be with me. And he...I said, just follow my lead, you know, we aren't going to insist on things, this is not an American meeting, these are friends meeting, and we are friends. We want them to succeed, and that's the whole point of this meeting. So they were asking me about committees, and I said, well I'll tell you...oh, they said, what committees do the U.S. Senate have? And I said, is that how you want to organize your Senate, like the U.S. Senate? And they said, yeah. And I said, well, you name the first Vietnamese you're sending to the moon. They said, we aren't going to send any Vietnamese to the moon; we're fighting a war out there; we haven't time to send people to the moon and so forth. I said, well, the U.S. Senate has time for such things, you know; they have got a Space Committee and everything; you don't need something like that, so you don't have to organize the way the U.S....is organized. What you need is committees to take the work

L: ...to work on your main problems. So I gave them sheets of yellow paper, pads, yellow pads, ruled pads, and I asked each one of them with pencils to write down what he figured the main problems of the country were. And I said, we Americans are going to leave the room, and I grabbed this fellow, Gil Scheimbaum, was his name, was the Ambassador's Aide, we became very close friends afterwards. And we went in the other room, and he said, is that the way you advise these people, and I said, that's the only way, you know, they have got to get the wheels going and...because they are very bright people and they have got to come up with their own answers to these things so they can live with them afterwards; they are their own, and I'm sure they are going to be good. So I got back in and they had...yeah?

--- Peter is here.

L: Peter? Hey, great.

Pause in tape

C: If you wonder occasionally, I will be getting up out of this chair and coming around and staring down here, it is to make sure that my batteries are continuing to function properly.

L: Okay.

C: Do you suppose part of Ellsworth Bunker's advantages could have been that he was quite elderly and the Orientals respect elderly folk very often?

L: Uh, it might have been. I think it was a trait of his character though that they recognized. They were very perceptive people on character. We started training people in speaking Vietnamese when they came over, which is all new to me, because originally when I was over serving in Viet Nam, no Americans spoke Vietnamese, but later on there many of them did. And I noticed that at big gatherings, where the Americans and Vietnamese were mixing, at official functions and so forth, the Vietnamese-speaking Americans would get

L: baffled looks on their faces once in awhile, and I would ask them what it was and they said, I don't know what they are saying they would tell me. And it was on political talks, so I went to the Vietnamese and I asked them about it. And they told me, they made up slang to get around the Americans that spoke Vietnamese, so I put out a Slang Dictionary for the Americans, with Vietnamese political slang that...that whole thing had grown up so they had nicknames for all sorts of people and events, and so forth, and on and on and on, they would add ones on top of the others. And the same guys that invented the slang were telling me what it was all about and everything and...and it was...it's with my papers on the Hoover, I think...I hope it is anyhow. But that's the type of thing that I used to do to try to get the Americans to understand the Vietnamese a little more. Certain things I wouldn't give away, but along with the slang, they had slang names for leading Americans out there: the Ambassador and the generals and so forth and the Aide people. And they gave me that and I listed them all, and I didn't tell who was who. I told them what the slang words meant, but I didn't tell them who it was. And they had...Wesley was Mr. Four Stars; I was the General in there. I wasn't a general, you know, really to them, but that was...they said the General. I said, oh, you mean Wesley. They said no, no, and very embarrassed, they said that's the nickname we gave you. Another one was something about a dragon, dragon in the fields, or something like that. But there is a lion, that's part of a Vietnamese name, sounded a little like my name but it was either a red dragon of the fields or dragon or something. That's a good luck figure, they said. And then they had, I finally discovered, they had about six or seven of these damned names for me, nicknames, and I kept getting them from the same people and so forth. And these were journalists and political figures

L: around, and cabinet members, and the damnedest assortment of people, and politicians of all sorts and the military, Vietnamese military, so it was one of the reasons I stayed on: I sensed that there was an influence that could be given and I would do that. So I...and Bunker was smart enough to let me stay and do that. I was stupid enough to return for the Tet offensive though. God, I didn't know that was coming. I really didn't. Wesley and all the others, said, we knew it was coming, and I said, why didn't you tell me, I didn't know, see. But I was...Bunker, ^{when} ~~at~~ the Tet offensive started, it started at night, and his Marine guards where he lived there got worried about his safety; they figured that, well, this residence must be one of the places they are going to hit, they are hitting the Embassy, so they pulled him out of there, and they headed for my place because I had put out the word to all the...my Vietnamese friends, I live in the ^{safest} ~~safety~~ house in Saigon, and the enemy won't attack there. I told everybody that.

C: Now, why did you say it was the safest house?

L: Just to reassure them was all. So these Marine guards had picked it up from the Vietnamese, you know, the safest place in Saigon was my place, so they ^{came} ~~over~~. And when the attack was going on, they were shooting all over town, a lot of explosions, why, my staff and I changed into black pajamas immediately, see, and went out around the house to watch out for the whole neighborhood. And I had the Vietnamese families in about a three-four block area in sort of a network to inform each other of needs and any strangers in the area. And we would help them, so we went out and patrolled that whole area, and then Bunker arrived. Well, along, just before he got there, there were all sorts of other people, Vietnamese refugees coming in from different areas, some of them to tell me what was going on, but some of them coming in to find safety.

L: They were afraid at home, and others bring their cars in because their cars get hit by artillery or something where they are, but I had a safe house, so they would bring them in and park them in the yard. And so we were getting cars parked in the yard, and people, so finally I had to put up cots out in the yard for all these people coming in. And then Bunker came in with these guys, and the Marine guards were taking a second hard look at it. And we were in black pajamas, see, and here was this mob of people and we had some of the young American volunteers from the civilian volunteer group, who had been working with the Vietnamese and their headquarters was on the outskirts of Saigon and had been overrun in the first VC movement into town, had ^{been} taken and driven all of the people out of there. There had been fighting and ambushes all out in their area, so some of them ran in, came in, to tell me what had happened to their headquarters and that they were homeless and so on....and with me. So Bunker got in with this mob and he was sitting there, and there was some young Yale guys, just out of Yale, were in this American volunteer group, and I said, there's another Yale, you know, Bunker was. They said to Bunker, what class were you with? And he said, you know, something, '08 or whatever it was, class of 19....

SIDE 2

L: So I gave him my bedroom and he lay down to take a nap and his Marine guards were more and more nervous and they weren't reassured because I and my boys were still going out around the neighborhood and talking. And I said, well, this is as safe as anyplace, far safer than most in Saigon. And we got word of anybody coming this way, I assure you. Well, they didn't believe it, and they took him over to Habib's place that night later on, they...because he lived over in the compound that they figured was off the beaten track and far safer, and I think that was right...I lived on a main drag. But the VC and the

L: Communists would...would declare an anti-American week and claim they were going to come and kill some Americans, and they would always list me as one of them, you know, and Wesley and whoever, and the Ambassador or somebody, and they are coming in to get us on Radio Hanoi and so, I would usually throw a party to welcome Hate American Week, and put loudspeakers outside the house and have music and I would have Vietnamese in. We would sing and invite them, come on in if you dare, you know, let's see the first guy that dares come up to the yard, we're going to shoot you down if you come so...

C: So you were sitting with an M-16 in your hand?

L: No...what...we had different armaments there. I was a great believer in hand grenades, and this 2-story house, you stay upstairs safe and get down and throw them through the windows and down the stairs and everything. That's a great way to keep them back. But, they never did attack. They were all around us, real strange. The guy across the street was out in Saigon at the same time, and I have talked to him. He kept going in a building on the street behind me in back, one of them that we were in touch with all the time, and he never knew just where I lived there; it was right next to where he was. But...there were three Vietnamese families around where he was. There was a little American *installation (?)* insulation there, but three Vietnamese families, or husbands, were away in the military and I promised them I would take care of, look out for their wives and kids, and so I was checking with all of them during the thing. And they sent their teenage kids out around the neighborhood to help patrol. But there were Americans from the Embassy living in the area, and we went up and knocked on one door and called out who we were and asked if they were all right, and there was no answer in there. The next day I was down at the Embassy and I heard these two guys talking, we were hiding under our beds and the VC came up to our door and knocked...We could peek out and see their black pajamas. I

L: said, you damned fools, we were just checking and seeing if you were all right and needed any help and if you weren't hiding under the bed, you could have seen that we were Americans.

C: What can you tell me about Maxwell Taylor? Your reactions toward him...

L: Oh, I want to go slow on such things...I...Maxwell Taylor is really a charming man. I admit his charm and his manners and his language and his approach to life, but he essentially turned me off at the same time. I served sort of a distance from him. I figured that his ego would get in front of his judgment at times, and I was afraid of that. And there was a coldness that came from, I think, from command for a long time, which once again turned me off.

Pause in Tape

C: You were saying about Maxwell Taylor?

L: Well, Maxwell Taylor when I got to know him was at the White House as a sort of a special assistant to President Kennedy, and went over to Viet Nam in the early fall of 1961, and I was asked...Kennedy had asked me to go over and I didn't know it was to be part of a group, I thought he wanted me to go over by myself and take a look at some things. Instead of that, I went with Taylor, who took about, oh, eight people or something, he and Rostow, and I had known Rostow for a time at State. He was a person I used to go over and talk to a great deal about our international problems and so on, and when we went on this trip, Taylor had a list of names and had a line drawn across after the first four names or something, had a line across, and he said, well now, we'll be making some protocol calls on the President of Viet Nam, and we are going on to Thailand after that and take a quick look at some things there, and we will be talking to the Prime Minister there, and so on. And so all those names above the line will go in with me on calls to visit the Chiefs of

L: State and so on and the rest of you won't. Well, I was just the name below the line. Well, it was sort of stupid on his part, he knew, he knew me enough from being at the White House and so forth, and my response to a lot of the tasks that he would set, that I knew the top people out in Asia, and it would have helped him if he had said, you come along and, you know, ease the atmosphere. But he didn't, and it got very embarrassing. We landed at the airport at Saigon, and the press was there and started to talk to them and he was meeting with the press, and the President Diem's people from the palace came right up to me at the airport, and said the President would like to see you immediately, see. So, I had to tell Taylor. Well, he was busy with the press, but Walt Rostow was there. I said, well, Diem has invited me up to the palace and I'll go. And it's this afternoon and I might be there for dinner, I don't know. Would you please tell the boss, you know that this isn't a protocol call, I'm just going to see an old friend, see. So I, I went up there, and the first thing Diem asked was, he said, what's Taylor like, see? So I told him, well, don't be afraid of him, he's trying to figure out what you might need and how best we might help you, and so on. He was telling me, said, well, do we ask for American troops. I said, I never told Taylor this, I never told anybody this, said, do you think you need American troops, you tell me that. Well, he said, you mean I shouldn't ask it? I said, no, do you need them; I asked you the question. He wouldn't answer that. So I said you just be honest with him when you talk with him on this thing. So that's the time Brother Nhu sat in on the conference, and I didn't like that at all, because I would ask, originally ask Diem questions and Nhu would answer. And I said I was asking your brother those questions, not you. And it wasn't too happy a meeting on the thing, but they asked me to stay over for dinner, and I

L: did. But it was a slightly different atmosphere from what I usually worked with them. We were friends; he wasn't chief of State and I wasn't an American; we were just two men who happened to know each other.

C: Well, what did Taylor think when he arrived for his political visit and you were there with Diem?

L: Well, that protocol visit was the next day; oh, he had known already. Walt Rostow had told him that I was up there. And I went back and told him, he wanted to know what you guys were after and so on, and I told him about our conversation. We went into Thailand, and the Thai armed forces gave us a briefing, and the Thai Chief of Staff was up there and they had situation map was all set up and neon tubes showing the probable advent of the enemy in an attack on Viet Nam; neon tubes down, permanent display, they would push a light and it would go on red and so on. I was sitting way back in the room off to one side, I thought, inconspicuously, and Taylor would ask questions and the Chief of Staff would say, didn't you tell him, Ed, you know. And, oh, God. (laughter)

C: That put you on the spot...

L: Yeah. And Walt Rostow said afterwards, you said you knew these guys, I didn't know...I said, no, the guy is a great...he makes marmalade, that's his one thing he does every year. He sends me marmalade every year, you know, from Bangkok...it is very good and he is one of the world's greatest golfers. He's an Air Force General, but that isn't his mainstay. I said you go up and hit him up in Burma where the Chief of State's one weakness is, he plays golf and get this guy up to play golf with him, see and... Rangoon (illegible) and he's the one guy, get very close to him. I said that is one of the importances out here; you have to know these things.

C: Well, on balance, do you think Maxwell Taylor helped or hurt the American-

C: Vietnamese efforts?

L: I don't think he understood it, really. I think very few of the military minds understood the problem that they were facing, or what the enemy was, how they were trying to fight...the...the political basis behind their military activities, and the political results that they were trying to achieve through their military and other actions, psychological and economic and so on. They had a whole series of things, but they were going for political aims always. And we went out to kill the enemy, a very different thing, and wouldn't understand. And that's where Bill Colby ^{with} ~~was~~ his savvy of taking a look at the political end of things was right, and he was the one that got the Phoenix operation going and so on. He again was trying to tackle the political end of the enemy operation, and he was right insofar as the way, this is picking out what to do. Whether it was done exactly correctly or not, ~~that is the~~ ^a moot point, but it was the right thing to do, and very much to the point. I don't know, the military out there..I had some close friends, one of them was Bill Rosson, who was Wesley's Chief of Staff, is a close friend of mine. He had been out in Viet Nam before. He was one of Iron Mike O'Daniel's fair haired boys, been in the Third Division with him, War Two in Europe, and I knew others on there, on the staff, it was three whom I didn't care for, whose name I can't think of now...you were talking about enemies, I think that's a guy that ^{just disliked me for...} ~~is~~ (illegible phrase)...if I think of his name. He took over the Big Red One and ran it for a time, out there, the First Division. I'll think of his name, but he was Westley's G-3. In all...I never thought he understood the Viet Nam War. He's retired not far from here, somewhere or other...I wouldn't go across the street to say hello to him. It disturbs me. Ross and I wouldn't. Rossen was essentially a much more honest person and...trying to learn anyhow...

C: Well, you suggested that Maxwell Taylor's military set of mind prevented him from seeing some of the political realities. You were a military man and you saw political realities...why the difference?

L: Well...yes, go along with some of my enemies, I might not be a military man. That was...Leland Hobbs was the JUSMAAG (illegible) Chief in the Philippines when Magsaysay was made the Secretary of Defense, and I was on JUSMAAG (illegible) and a friend of mine came out, Army Colonel, ... George Chester, and George Chester had known Leland Hobbs for a time, and Leland Hobbs was a two star and been up in Korea before coming down to the Philippines. And Chester was trying to get Hobbs' help in helping him get a star, and going to work on it right in front of me; it was sort of embarrassing to sit and watch these guys operate on each other. And Hobbs said, well, he said, I'd recommend Ed for a star before I would you. This guy was taken aback, he had been in the Army for years, and he said, why? He said, well, like up in Korea now, I'd give Ed the Division to run and he wouldn't know how to do it at first, but nobody'd ever catch on, and by the time we really got to checking him, he'd be running the best God damned Division up there. He said, he's got something that makes these things work, see. And you, you would be trying hard and would be reading books on how to do it and everything and your Division would be getting in hot water and you wouldn't even understand how it was getting in hot water, but he said, that's the whole difference. And I said, hey, you're being a little cruel here, and I don't want to be a part of this. And that was because...they hadn't wanted JUSMAAG to be out where the shooting was, and the people that couldn't, out in the casualty areas, and I...I said that my Assistants and I are going out. We are working right along with these Filipinos and it doesn't matter where we are, we are going to be close to them, all over and

L: it doesn't matter their rank or anything, we are going to be close to them and advising them, and so we were the only exceptions to the rule. And he was, he saw the time I tried to get a submarine from...from Washington to ...I had an idea of getting all the Huk leadership out on a Soviet sub, allegedly and...

C: You told me about that. That is a neat idea.

L: I...I finally talked ~~to~~ ^{into} a guy flying a C-47 over to Guam, where I could meet some guys from Washington and explain...Washington thought I was crazy, and I said I would meet them in Guam, so this guy says, well, I think we can make it; I'm not sure and so forth. Do you want to go? I said, yeah, let's go, right now. And Hobbs was watching that, and I think it impressed him, you know. I said, no, this has got to be done; we've got to explain this to these guys to understand. And finally the C-47 conked out and we couldn't make the trip, and Washington turned me down cold on that. And then Arleigh Burke came down from Korea, and I met him at Ambassador Collins for lunch, and I was telling him about it. And I said, you got submarines up there I can borrow? He said, you're damn right...just yell at me, I'll get them down here fast...that's a good idea that you got...try it out, whether it works or not, let's try it. So, a very different type of response, so he and I clicked right away.

C: How about Don Heath?

L: Don Heath was a very likeable person. I liked him a lot. He was very pro-France; he couldn't see the mistakes that the French had made, but he was a Frankophile. He had gone to school there in France, impeccable French and so forth. He admired French food and everything about them, I guess. But, he was one of them that...he and O'Daniel wanted me to come out to Viet

L: Nam, and I was supposed to be helping both of them, the military and the political, the diplomatic whatever, so he always tried to support me in what I was doing. I remember the first time I had a get-together and I invited Vietnamese in for it and the Americans, it was a party and I had no glasses or anything, I had gone out and bought some wine, I needed some glasses for the wine, and I invited everybody to the party if they would bring their own glasses. So he came over, he and his wife, with a whole carton of glassware, you know, for me, and start in with this, you know, and, very nice, and he sat around the party. And I was getting Vietnamese that were rivals of each other, and in those days, they would kill each other...getting them in a room together was very strange business. And he said, how do you do it? And I said, well, here...they were there...these two guys swore up and down they would kill each other the next time they see each other, they are right here. I explained to them that these are stucco walls in there and it is a hell of a thing to get blood out of them, you know, in stucco, once it gets ^{Melded in on} in the stucco, you can't really scrub it out very well, so we take their guns away at the door as they come in, sobe here at the time, at least be civil to each other.

C: It's like a western...

L: Yeah, yeah. (illegible phrase)...yeah, that's great. Well, one of the Vietnamese was a wild man...really was...he was a gorilla breeder, and Diem threw him out of the country. He had joined the wrong side against Diem. But...he came over for a visit in Washington years later, and the Washington Post asked him, you know, about who he was to see, and he said, I came over, among other things I wanted to see, an old enemy of mine, an old rival, Ed Lansdale. We were having drinks together and so forth down at the Hotel

L: Washington, reminiscing about the old days. And they said, what about it, and he said, well, he was the one guy that understood my country very well, and we liked him over there. But he said he was backing the wrong people and I was against them, and he was for them and so on, and we were fighting out there and we lost. I wanted to see if he still felt the same, but we ^{are} ~~were~~ good drinking buddies, and so, that's why he came over. And they wrote a nice little article on it. I don't know whether I still have it or not. I can't think of his name; I'm trying to remember it. It's in my book because that was in the old ^{days out there.} ~~A~~. He appropriated a house in Saigon; he just moved his troops into it. And the owners came to kick him out of their house, and they just turned their machine guns on them, and they said leave, leave, get away, don't bother us here. They came over to see me, please tell him to move his troops out of our house. I said, I'll go over and talk to him and see, but if he doesn't move, I can't do anything...the guys with machine guns there want to live in their house, ^{and I} ~~A~~ can't kick them out. So I went over...that's how I got to know him.

C: What about J. Lawton ~~(illegible)~~ Collins?

L: Well, he was a character, very different. You know, age makes ^{you} ~~it~~ more ^{charitable.} ~~terrible.~~ I...at the time, I used to think he wasn't too bright and he probably wasn't. He was used to a Washington, big world concept, the center of the world thing, and this is off in something else. Words would mean one thing to an American in Washington, and the same words would mean something very different ^{out} ~~in~~ Saigon. And he used to fool himself with these words, and he would talk about Civil Service. Well, he never knew there wasn't a Civil Service out there; it was a Civil Service that wasn't trained and hadn't worked together, and didn't extend beyond Saigon. There were a few in a

L: couple of other cities, but this great Civil Service that was keeping the government going wasn't really in existence. It needed an awful lot of work on it. He would talk about government as though it existed with a Civil Service and buildings and communications and money and budget and so forth. There wasn't such a thing there. The French were very reluctant on turning power over to the Vietnamese and they had a French structure with a Vietnamese fringe on it. And the Americans there, including Collins, never understood that. They couldn't even see, it was right there. I was running pacification, among other things, in those days and I got the Vietnamese government to call a meeting of all the province chiefs so we could go over their problems. Well, the big meeting was in Saigon. Well, about half the province chiefs were French. Where there were Vietnamese, there were French that came along with them, to tell them, you stand up now, you speak now, and so on, and answer this question; advisers in a very strong sense. We were trying to decide what the category of security would be in these places, because the... Viet ^{Minh} ~~Nam~~ were withdrawing under the Geneva accord...regrouping up in the north at that time from where they had been in the south, and leaving the administrations and provinces to us who had nothing, sometimes nothing. I wasn't even sure that the provincial chiefs were living out in the provinces or had been in Saigon all the time ^{or not.} But this wasn't generally known, and we were dealing with a country and a government that ^{was} tremendously weak as a government, and one of the things I was trying to do was to get a government going and get institutions out in the provinces to respond to the things in Saigon ^{and} Saigon to respond to things out in the provinces, which wasn't happening, because there were no real communications at all, and, for example, we started a veterans' group there and the Philippines veterans came over and helped me form it, and I was trying to get provincial chapters of veterans, and this is...

L: veterans of French forces, Vietnamese from there, but they had been fighting against the Viet ^{Ninh} Nam. And get them doing things to help their province mates, their countrymen. I figured, well, they risked their lives, at least they'll have guts enough to stand up and ask for things out where they are, and this will be a good way to get the...some voices out in the provinces that we can listen to and...back in to us. And I was trying all that type of thing. But the Americans who were working on the training policy for the, for the Civil Service, but they were thinking of starting it in about two or three years, and it would take a long time to staff and create this thing. And supposedly we had a, in a national election coming up to, between the north and the south to decide the future of the country. And I was just telling.., this will be too late, you know, to wait two or three years on an election that's all over but we have to have things done immediately and...on a sketchy basis maybe, but we'll do what we can, make do in the meantime and these plans can come about later, but you have to work now. This is one of the places where I didn't make friends. They couldn't understand the need to hurry, you know, they didn't get a sense at all of the timing of the events out there, and I was full of it and I was being goaded all the time by my perception of what the timetable was that Hanoi was setting, really, and had set at the accords in Geneva. It's strange, I...we never paid that much attention to what the Communist leadership must be thinking and planning and so on, but it always worried me, and I didn't know, didn't have any insights into it but I was always worrying about it. I'll have to show you something I wrote later on when I got some second thoughts on the war and I wrote a piece, I don't know whether I showed it to you or not...

C: What's it called?

L: I'll go get it and show it to you. They asked me to write a foreword for a book being published, done out in Ohio and I sat down and wrote one of these, boy, if I could only do it over again, you know, what would have been done. And this is a book with pieces out of the Washington Post, a columnist about Viet Nam, largely against the war, so....so I did the foreword, second thoughts^{about} a former war, past war, but I explained the political precepts that were in the thing, and I figured, well, at least the columnists who have articles there will get a copy of this book and read it. I want them to do some thinking^{on it.} I'll go get it for you. Cut that off and we'll go down and I'll get some sandwiches for lunch...